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ABSTRACT

Student outcomes at Australia's technical and further education (TAFE) institutes were compared to those at Australian universities. The study was based on data from a survey completed by 39,426 individuals who had graduated from TAFE courses in 2000 and a survey of the more than 150,000 individuals who graduated from an Australian university in 2000. Key findings were as follows: (1) 77% of TAFE graduates and 66% of the university graduates found jobs, as compared to the nationwide employment rate of 61%; (2) TAFE graduates found employment in a broad range of occupations, with some concentration as tradespersons and related workers, whereas university graduates were concentrated in relatively few occupations, particularly professionals and associate professionals; (3) TAFE graduates' earnings varied considerably and were generally lower than those of university graduates; (4) male and female TAFE graduates had average weekly earnings of $491 and $433, whereas male and female university graduates' weekly earnings averaged $711 and $651; and (5) 90.3% of TAFE graduates were working or in further study and 28.6% were both working and in further study, whereas 92.6% of university graduates were working or undertaking further study and 6.5% were both working and in further study. (Ten Web site addresses are listed.) (MN)

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Statistics 2001

TAFE and university graduates 15-24 years

This publication brings together some of the outcomes from study at TAFE and university by young people aged 15-24 years, and highlights the similarities and differences between the two groups, including success in finding a job.

Some key findings

- Job outcomes[1] for TAFE (77%) and university (66%) graduates are very good compared with the overall Australian population (61% employed). For more, see page 3.
- Salaries and job types differ considerably between graduates from TAFE and university, indicating that their training leads to different sectors of the labour market. For more, see pages 4-6.
- Around one-third of TAFE and university graduates are involved in further study after their course (42% of TAFE graduates and 34% of university graduates). For more, see page 8.
- A majority of graduates from both sectors said they were satisfied with the overall quality of their course. For more, see page 8.

Australian Vocational Education & Training

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Introduction

TAFE and university are different, yet similar. They are similar in the success of graduates finding work[1], and in the high levels of satisfaction with the courses completed by graduates. They are also similar in that opportunities for further study open up after completion of initial study. However, different lengths of study and qualifications completed at TAFE or university impact on the types of jobs their graduates find, and on the salaries which their graduates can earn.

With all of these similarities and differences, in the final analysis TAFE and university both provide excellent opportunities for learning, and both meet the education and training needs of a highly diverse range of people throughout Australia.

In this publication the focus is on graduates who are under 25 years of age, highlighting the outcomes of their TAFE or university experience, including:

- finding a job
- types of jobs
- salary levels
- qualifications gained
- satisfaction with training
- further study plans.

These outcomes were compiled from information gathered through surveys of graduates who completed their training in 2000. Separate surveys of TAFE graduates and university graduates are conducted annually. (For more on the surveys, see page 11.)

Background – enrolments and growth in the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors

Size of the sectors

In terms of students, the vocational education and training (VET) sector, of which TAFE is a major part, is more than twice the size of the higher education sector. However, in the VET sector, just under one in ten students are enrolled for full-time study, whereas around eight in ten students in the higher education sector are enrolled full-time.

Both sectors have experienced considerable growth over the past 10 years.

- The VET sector has grown by 69% between 1992 and 2001, to over 1.75 million students. Most of these, 1.29 million, were in vocational programs in TAFE institutions and other government providers in Australia in 2001. Just over 135,000 TAFE students completed formal qualifications during 2001.
- The higher education sector has grown by around 30% over the past 10 years to over 700,000 students in 2001. Around 96,000 university students completed an undergraduate course in 2001.

[1] Job outcomes for TAFE graduates relate to those employed 6 months after completing their course, while for university graduates their job outcomes relate to 4 months after their course.

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Were young graduates able to find a job?

Young people recognise that having a job brings independence, choices, opportunities and experience. Success in getting a job[2] after graduating was similarly high for TAFE and university graduates aged under 25 years, as shown in table 1. The results show good outcomes in both sectors, well above the national average for Australians aged 15-24 years.

- Completion of study increases job opportunities - around three-quarters (77.3%) of TAFE graduates are employed within six months of completing their course, and two-thirds (66.3%) of university graduates within four months. The corresponding proportion for the population as a whole is somewhat lower (61.3%).
- On the other hand university graduates are around 2.5 times more likely not to be looking for work than TAFE graduates. Possible reasons for not looking for work could include a commitment to further study, family responsibilities or travel. (For more on further study outcomes see page 8.)
- TAFE graduates (25.0%) are twice as likely as university graduates (11.6%) to be employed part-time and are also more likely to be unemployed (11.8% compared to 5.0%).
- Around one in seven Australians aged 15-24 years studying for a qualification are employed full-time, increasing to around one in two after graduation from TAFE or university.

Table 1: Per cent of TAFE, university graduates and Australian population by labour force status, 2001

			Australian population	
	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Studying for a qualification[3]	Total[4]
	15-24 years			
Employed:	77.3	66.3	50.2	61.3
Full-time	51.1	54.7	13.6	34.3
Part-time	25.0	11.6	36.6	26.9
Unemployed:	11.8	5.0	7.8	9.9
Seeking full-time work	7.5	4.6	1.6	6.2
Seeking part-time work	4.3	0.4	6.2	3.7
Not in labour force	10.6	28.7	42.0	28.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

2 The figures are not absolutely comparable because of the slightly different times at which graduates were surveyed.
3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, *Education and Work, May 2001*, Cat No. 6227.0, ABS, Canberra.
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, *Labour Force Australia, May 2001*, Cat. No. 6203.0, ABS, Canberra. Total column includes TAFE and university graduates.

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What occupations do graduates find?

Overall employment outcomes for graduates from TAFE and university are very similar, with over two-thirds of graduates employed soon after completing their course. However, major differences between the concentration of graduates in occupations, as shown in table 2, indicate that TAFE and university prepare graduates for different occupational segments of the labour market.

- TAFE graduates are working in a broad range of occupations, with some concentration as *tradespersons and related workers*, in jobs such as motor mechanics, carpenters, electricians and chefs, and as *intermediate* and *elementary clerical, sales and service workers*, in jobs such as sales assistants, storepersons, waiters and personal assistants.
- University graduates are concentrated in only a few occupations, particularly *professionals* and *associate professionals*, in jobs such as accountants, doctors, dentists, physiotherapists and research officers.

Table 2 highlights these differences.

Table 2: Per cent of employed TAFE and university graduates and Australian population by occupation, 2001

Occupation category	TAFE graduates	University graduates	Australian population	
			Studying for a qualification[3]	Total[4]
	15-24 years			
Managers and administrators	2.2	3.1	0.5^	0.8
Professionals	6.0	61.1	6.7	9.4
Associate professionals	6.3	11.1	5.0	6.4
Tradespersons and related workers	33.1	0.2	14.0	14.3
Advanced clerical and service workers	2.9	2.7	1.8	3.1
Intermediate/elementary clerical, sales and service workers[5]	37.8	17.0	55.8	46.7
Intermediate production and transport workers/ labourers and related workers[5]	11.7	1.1	16.1	19.5
Unknown	-	3.7	-	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- University graduates (61.1%) are around 10 times more likely than TAFE graduates (6.0%) to be employed as *professionals*, and around seven times the proportion of 15-24 year olds in the Australian workforce (9.4%).
- University graduates (75.3%) are five times more likely to be employed in the professional and managerial occupations than TAFE graduates (14.5%). Very few university graduates are employed as labourers or production and transport workers.
- TAFE graduates are employed across a much wider range of occupations than university graduates. However, about one-third (33.1%) are employed as *tradespersons and related workers* and just over one-fifth (23.0%) as *intermediate clerical, sales and service workers*.

[5] Two occupation categories are combined to enable comparability between the university and TAFE sectors.

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- TAFE graduates are more than twice as likely to be *tradespersons and related workers* (33.1%) than all Australians aged 15-24 years (14.3%), reflecting the wide range of trade related training, including apprenticeships and traineeships, available at TAFE.
- While studying for a qualification, young Australians are mainly employed as *intermediate* and *elementary clerical, sales and service workers* (17.4% and 38.4% respectively), often in casual, part-time jobs such as waiters; however, once they have a qualification, TAFE graduates are two and a half times less likely to be *elementary clerical, sales and service workers*, chiefly because they have found work in higher skilled occupations.
- Consistent with their predominance as professionals, an extremely small proportion, around 1.0%, of university graduates obtain employment as *intermediate production and transport workers/labourers and related workers*, in comparison to around 12% for TAFE graduates and around 20% for all Australians aged 15-24 years.

What were graduates earning?

In terms of salary levels, there are considerable differences between university and TAFE graduate outcomes. However, it has to be remembered that there are many reasons for these differences. They include:

- The types of courses offered by TAFE and university and the different levels of prior academic achievement they require.
- The length of course studied - a one year course for school-leavers at TAFE will naturally lead to different job opportunities compared to a three year course at university.
- Higher starting salaries for higher-skilled occupations - after specifically targeted study in law or dentistry, for example, new university graduates will receive a higher salary compared to the salaries of TAFE-trained graduates in a wider range of semi-professional and trade-related occupations.
- Within the same occupation group, TAFE and university graduates may receive different salaries because of the different occupation sub-groups they enter.

Put simply, longer education and training will usually lead to higher earnings, and in general, managerial and professional occupations pay more than other occupations.

Table 3 provides the average weekly earnings of TAFE and university graduates who are under 25 years of age and in their first full-time job. In particular it shows that:

- TAFE graduate earnings vary considerably and are generally lower than for university graduates, given the reasons noted above.
- *Managers and administrators*, and *professionals* provide the highest paying occupations for both TAFE and university graduates, with university graduates earning $710 and $693 per week respectively, and TAFE graduates $582 and $531 per week respectively. For university graduates these occupations include accountants, doctors, engineers and registered nurses. TAFE graduates could be employed, for example, as technical sales representatives, radio presenters and interior designers.
- The *tradespersons and related workers* sector of the labour market is almost entirely supplied by TAFE graduates, earning an average of $478 per week. These people would have jobs such as sound technicians, chefs, hairdressers, automotive electricians, plumbers and builders.

Table 3: Average weekly earnings of first full-time job holders, TAFE and university graduates, 2001		
	TAFE graduates[6] $	University graduates[7] $
Males	491	711
Females	433	651
Persons	469	671
Occupation:		
Managers and administrators	582	710
Professionals	531	693
Associate professionals	531	645
Tradespersons and related workers	478	-
Advanced clerical and service workers	447	629
Intermediate/elementary clerical, sales and service workers[5]	429	568
Intermediate production and transport workers/ labourers and related workers[5]	438	526

The findings reported in table 3 are not unexpected, as they are consistent with the differing features of the TAFE and university sectors outlined earlier. By the very nature and length of the courses they offer, TAFE and university cater to different occupation and industry sectors of the labour market and together provide a trained and diverse workforce for Australia.

What qualifications did graduates gain?

The qualifications and awards that TAFE and university offer are different but complementary. TAFE offers qualifications ranging from Certificate I[8] up to bachelor's degree. University, offering mainly degree awards, has qualifications in the upper range, from diploma to doctoral degree. There is only minimal overlap between the sectors' qualification ranges.

Table 4 indicates the qualifications awarded to TAFE and university graduates under 25 years of age. It shows that the majority of university graduates received a pass bachelor's degree, but TAFE graduates were more widely spread across the range of qualifications other than a bachelor's degree.

The differences in qualifications awarded are:

- Almost nine in 10 university graduates (87.2%) undertook courses leading to a pass bachelor's degree. This qualification usually requires a minimum of three years of full-time study.

6 For TAFE graduates, average weekly earnings have been derived from mid-points within specified salary ranges.

7 For university graduates, average weekly earnings have been derived from annual salary data.

8 The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) comprises twelve national qualifications issued in the secondary schools sector, the vocational education and training sector (TAFE and registered private providers) and the higher education sector (mainly universities).

- The predominant single qualification of TAFE graduates was the AQF Certificate III or equivalent (trade certificate), with close to 40% qualifying at this level. The requirements for this vary between disciplines but can be as much as 2-3 years of study although not necessarily full-time.
- Around eight in ten (81.1%) of TAFE qualifications awarded were for Certificates I to IV (and equivalent). These levels, requiring from several months to several years of study, are not offered at university.

Table 4: Per cent of TAFE and university graduates by qualification, 2001

	TAFE graduates	University graduates
Honours bachelor's degree	-	11.9
Pass bachelor's degree	-	87.2
AQF diploma, associate & advanced diploma	17.6	0.9
AQF Certificate IV & equivalent	10.8	-
AQF Certificate III & equivalent	38.8	-
AQF Certificate II	23.8	-
AQF Certificate I	7.7	-
Other certificates	1.4	-
Total	100.0	100.0

Pathways - flexible education and training pathways

AQF qualifications link with each other in a range of learning pathways between schools, vocational education and training providers and universities, as a student's learning and career ambitions require. Cross-sectoral linkage programs are made possible by such arrangements as:

- Articulation and Credit Transfer – allowing articulation of programs and maximum credit transfer between registered vocational education and training providers and universities; and
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – allowing credit towards a qualification through assessment of an individual's knowledge and skills gained through education, training, work and life experience.

Examples of pathways within and between TAFE and university include:

- Entry into higher level TAFE courses on completion of lower level courses such as Certificate I, many of which are designed as 'pre-employment' courses.
- TAFE courses articulating to university degrees, with the potential for credit transfer from the previous TAFE course. Of those TAFE graduates going on to further study at university, 49.1% received some RPL relating to their previous TAFE course.
- University graduates enrolling in a TAFE course to acquire additional workplace or other skills, also with the opportunity for credit transfer or RPL.

Graduates add to their training with further study

After graduation many TAFE and university graduates undertake further study to obtain additional and/or higher qualifications. More TAFE graduates than university graduates go on to do either full-time or part-time further study. Table 5 shows the percentage of graduates undertaking further study as well as the combined percentage in work or further study.

- Four in 10 TAFE (41.7%) and a third of university graduates (33.6%) are involved in further study, either full-time or part-time, after their course.
- Around eight in 10 (82.1%) university graduates undertaking further study do so at a university.
- Almost two-thirds (62.4%) of TAFE graduates undertaking further study go on to TAFE-related training and over a quarter (27.1%) go to university. Just over 38% of TAFE graduates who undertook further study had received RPL[9] for their previous TAFE course.
- Around nine in 10 university (92.6%) and TAFE (90.3%) graduates were either employed or in further study after their course, with most graduates in either full-time work or full-time study.
- TAFE graduates were almost six times more likely to be working and undertaking further study concurrently (28.6%) than university graduates (6.5%). This suggests a predominance of part-time study by TAFE graduates, evidenced by the fact that university graduates (82.6%) are twice as likely as TAFE graduates (45.7%) to undertake their study on a full-time basis.

Table 5: Per cent of TAFE and university graduates by employment and further study, 2001

	TAFE graduates	University graduates
Undertaking further study	41.7	33.6
Working or in further study	90.3	92.6
Working and in further study	28.6	6.5

Most are very satisfied with their course

Overall satisfaction with the quality of the course was similar for both university and TAFE graduates, but because different rating scales were used in the two questionnaires, direct comparisons should be treated with caution.

TAFE graduates rated the overall quality of their course as 'above average' or 'excellent' (a score of 7 or above on a 10 point scale) in 82.2% of cases, while 67.9% of university graduates agreed or strongly agreed (on a five point scale) that overall, they were satisfied with the quality of their course.

[9] When enrolling to undertake study for a qualification, students can apply for credit transfer from previous study completed. In the TAFE graduate questionnaire this was referred to generically as 'recognition for prior learning'.

What else do we know about young TAFE and university graduates?

TAFE and university graduates vary across a range of characteristics, as shown in table 6. In terms of age, university graduates are slightly older than TAFE graduates. Almost two-thirds of university graduates are aged 20-24 after graduation while for TAFE this group comprised just over one quarter of the population of graduates.

Of those graduates aged 15-24 years:

- TAFE graduates are younger (median age 20 years) than university graduates (22 years).
- Very few university graduates are aged under 19 (around 2%), compared to about 16% for TAFE graduates.
- University graduates are far more likely to be female[10] than male, while TAFE graduates are slightly more likely to be male than female.
- University graduates (82.6%) are almost twice as likely as TAFE graduates (45.7%) to undertake their course full-time.
- Indigenous Australians are far more likely to be undertaking a TAFE course (1.7%) compared to university (0.3%).
- Compared to university graduates, TAFE graduates are almost twice as likely to have a non-English-speaking background.
- University graduates are far more likely to move to undertake their study (26.8%) compared to TAFE graduates (9.4%).
- More university graduates (78.4%) have completed secondary school compared to TAFE graduates (64.8%).

Table 6: Demographic profile of TAFE and university graduates, 2001

	TAFE graduates	University graduates
Age at survey date:		
15-19 years	16.5%	2.3%
20-24 years	26.6%	62.1%
Median age	20 years	22 years
	15-24 years	
Males	53.3%	36.7%
Females	46.7%	63.3%
Undertook study on a full-time basis[11]	45.7%	82.6%
Indigenous Australians	1.7%	0.3%^A
Non-English-speaking background[12]	26.4%	15.9%
Relocate to do course	9.4%	26.8%
Completed secondary school (Year 12)	64.8%	78.4%

10 It is possible that more females than males responded to the university graduate survey.

11 TAFE calculation of full-time study, for the purposes of this publication, is nominally 16 hours or more per week. University definition of full-time study is not specific – the graduate questionnaire nominates full-time or part-time study categories but does not define the hours.

12 TAFE is based on language spoken at home by graduate or language of parents. University is based on self-identification as having a 'non-English-speaking background'.

Need more information?

Go to NCVER's website – www.ncver.edu.au

- for vocational education and training statistics and research
- to download a copy of this publication.

Other useful websites on qualifications, courses and careers include:

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) - helps all learners, employers and education and training providers to participate and navigate the qualifications system.
Website address: www.aqf.edu.au

Takeoff – a resource program which explains the features and benefits of vocational education and training, and explores the many different pathways.
Website address: www.takeoff.anta.gov.au

Gradlink - provides comprehensive information on careers, courses and graduate employment, relating to universities nationally.
Website address: www.gradlink.edu.au

My future - Australia's newest online career exploration and information service.
Website address: www.myfuture.edu.au

Australian JobSearch - provides an online job posting, search and matching service, including find-a-job searching, resume builder, job outlook, information on salaries, job prospects and occupation profiles.
Website address: www.jobsearch.gov.au

Australian WorkPlace – a guide to information on employment associations and the labour market, careers and training, jobs and working conditions, and government assistance. Also has links to media, publications, features, news and other related websites.
Website address: www.workplace.gov.au

Good Guides - information on how to access OZJAC, a national courses and careers information system.
Website address: www.curriculum.edu.au/ozjac/index.htm

Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) - a key national body helping young Australians move successfully from school to work. Its work has included development of industry-specific programs across Australia that combine classroom learning with structured on-the-job training.
Website address: www.ecef.com.au

Education Network Australia - a guide to other websites and information about anything to do with training/education in Australia.
Website address: www.edna.edu.au

About the surveys

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) conduct annual surveys of new graduates of TAFE and university respectively. These surveys measure a range of characteristics, including employment and further study outcomes, soon after graduates' completion of their course.

In 2001 the NCVER conducted a sample survey, to which 39,426 new TAFE graduates responded. These graduates successfully completed their course during 2000 and graduated with a qualification. The TAFE survey had a reference date of the last Friday in May 2001.

The GCCA surveyed over 150,000 new university graduates who qualified in 2000 from all Australian universities for the award of a degree or diploma. The university survey collected information from almost 58,000 bachelor level graduates who responded in two time periods - at the end of October 2000 for graduates completing their courses in the first half of 2000, and at the end of April 2001 for graduates completing their course in the second half of 2000.

The surveys provide estimates of the results that would be found if all graduates in Australia had been surveyed. The university survey was a census of graduates, and the TAFE survey was a sample survey, the responses of which are weighted to population benchmarks. As the survey estimates are based on information obtained from only a sample of graduates in both sectors, an allowance for sampling variability should be made when using the results.

One measure of sampling variability is the relative standard error, which is obtained by expressing the standard error as a percentage of the estimate to which it refers. The relative standard error is a useful measure, in that it provides an immediate indication of the percentage errors likely to have occurred due to sampling, and avoids the need to refer also to the size of the estimate. Unless marked with a ^ the estimates in this publication have a relative standard error of less than 25%.

Break in series

Readers referring to previous NCVER publications on TAFE and university graduates should note that there has been a break in series between 2000 and 2001, due to use of data for graduates under 25 years of age in this current publication. Information on all TAFE graduates can be provided on request.

This publication has been produced with the co-operation of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia, which provided the data on which the university graduate tables have been based.

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TAFE graduates work in a variety of jobs

Both TAFE and university cater for different segments of the labour market, as noted on page 4. The following case studies provide examples of the wide range of jobs that TAFE graduates enter.

Manager in sales and marketing, female, aged 23

- completed an Advanced Diploma in Accounting in just over three years of part-time study at TAFE
- her employer assisted by paying some of the fees and allowing some time off work to attend classes
- now earns about $750 gross per week in her first full-time job
- has worked for the same company since before starting the course
- received an increase in salary and a promotion as a result of gaining the qualification
- found her course, which involved class attendance and off-the-job training, was relevant to her work

Dairy farmer, male, aged 19

- works on the family farm
- completed Year 10 at high school and began his course within a few months of leaving school
- completed a Certificate IV in Agriculture (Dairying) part-time over three years at the local TAFE, while continuing to work on the farm
- found the course highly relevant to his work
- earns around $350 gross per week

Electrical contractor, male, aged 23

- as an apprentice, completed a Certificate III in Electrical Contracting
- after completing Year 10, worked full-time and started the course within 12 months of leaving school
- attended TAFE on block release from work and found the course highly relevant to his job
- now earns around $750 gross per week working in the firm where he did his apprenticeship

Childcare co-ordinator, female, aged 21

- completed a Certificate IV in Children's Services at TAFE
- did course work in the classroom as well as on-the-job, and gained her qualification after two years of part-time study
- earns around $350 gross per week
- received a promotion and a change of job as a result of completing her course
- supported herself while completing the course by working part-time in childcare
- found that her course was relevant to her job and has enrolled to do further study in childcare (a diploma) at TAFE

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